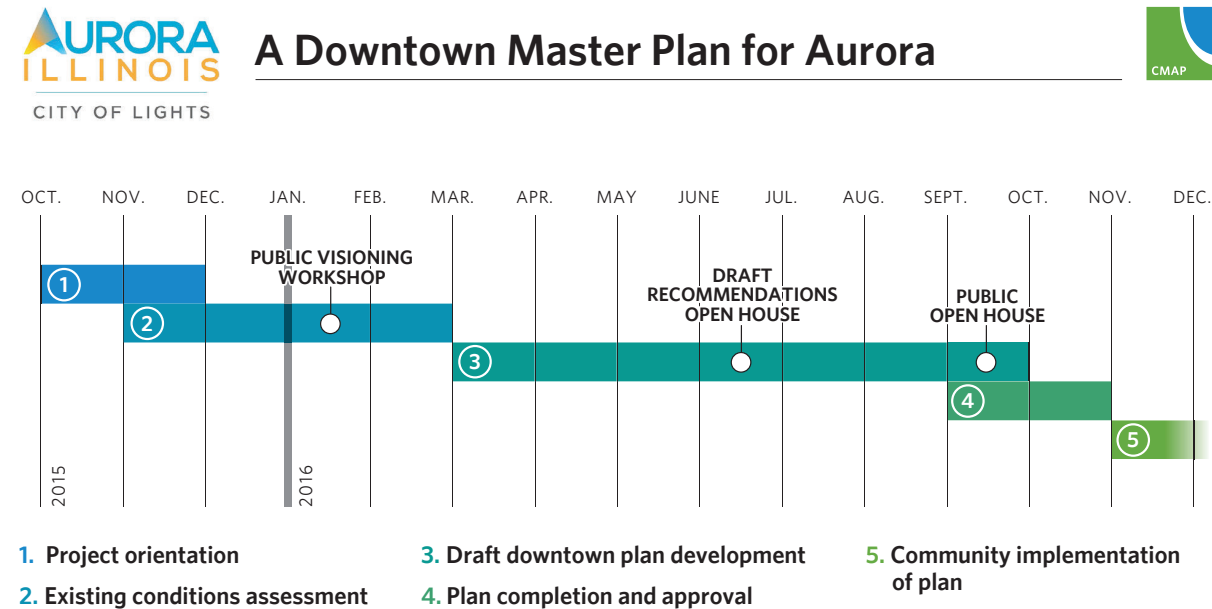


WHAT IS THE DOWNTOWN AURORA MASTER PLAN?

In late 2015, the City of Aurora began a process to update their Downtown Master Plan for the community. The Plan will outline the community's vision and define policies to help achieve that vision.

Downtown Aurora is rich in historic, cultural, and natural resources, which are highly valued and contribute to the quality of life enjoyed by its residents. Enhancing these qualities is the central priority of the Plan. Based on the key findings of the existing report, the following guiding principles emerged as priority recommendation areas to be addressed by the plan. These will form the structure of the plan.



Guiding Principles & Vision

1. Downtown Aurora will have a strong and diverse economic base, highlighting its creative entrepreneurs and restaurant options, built off of arts successes in the recent past.
2. Downtown Aurora will be welcoming to people who live here, work here, or just come to visit.
3. Downtown Aurora will be promoted and recognized as a desirable destination.
4. Downtown Aurora will have a comfortable and inviting environment for all modes of transportation.
5. The Fox River will be celebrated as the heart and center of Aurora.
6. Downtown Aurora will be known for its unique, memorable and attractive public spaces.
7. Downtown Aurora will be known for its robust and inspired arts, culture, and entertainment community.
8. Downtown Aurora will have a growing and engaged residential community.

READ THE EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT AND STAY INVOLVED:

<http://cmap.is/lta-aurora>

The City of Aurora received a grant for technical assistance to develop the Master Plan from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP).

CMAP is the regional planning agency for the seven counties of the Chicago Metropolitan area. CMAP is working with City staff and leaders to develop the Draft Plan.

THE PLAN WILL BE BASED ON PUBLIC INPUT

A plan is only as good as the commitment to implementing it by the public and their elected representatives. Therefore, it is crucial that public participation be a major component of plan development.

The City of Aurora and CMAP have worked to engage residents in the planning process through public workshops, one-on-one interviews with community leaders and stakeholders, steering committee meetings, focus group meetings, and on-going communication with City residents.

DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE

The steering committee was composed of representatives from several City departments, business community, arts community, developers and consultants, and residents. The steering committee provided guidance on the project and reviewed steps in the process:

- | | |
|---|---|
| Kirk Albinson, The Community Builders | Michael Groh, Pace Bus |
| Jimi Allen, Gravity Building | Dave Hulseberg, Invest Aurora |
| Lulu Blacksmith, Waubensee Community College | Sherman Jenkins, SLJ Development & Consultant, Inc. |
| Allison Buchwach, Metra | Alex Minnella, City of Aurora |
| Karen Christensen, Fox Valley Music Foundation & A-Town Poetics | Gina Moga, City of Aurora |
| Rena Church, Aurora Public Art | Cynthia Penne, Fox Valley Park District |
| Eric Gallt, City of Aurora | Cadence Peterson, Invest Aurora |
| Kim Granholm, Aurora Downtown | Stephane Phifer, City of Aurora |
| Joe Grisson, African American Heritage Advisory Board | Heather Tabbert, RTA |
| | Bill Wiet, City of Aurora |

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS



STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS



PUBLIC VISIONING WORKSHOP

- January 21, 2016



- ### DIRECT OUTREACH TO LOCAL GROUPS
- March 10th African-American Heritage Advisory Board Meeting
 - March 17th Public Workshop with Aurora Downtown
 - April 1st Visioning with First Fridays Participants
 - April 14th Indian American Community Outreach Advisory Board Meeting
 - April 20th Restore the Neighborhood Meeting
 - Visioning with 15th Annual El Día de Los Niños Participants
 - May 9th Aurora Hispanic Heritage Advisory Board Meeting
 - May 17th Alderman Saville's Ward Meeting



OUTREACH CONTINUES...

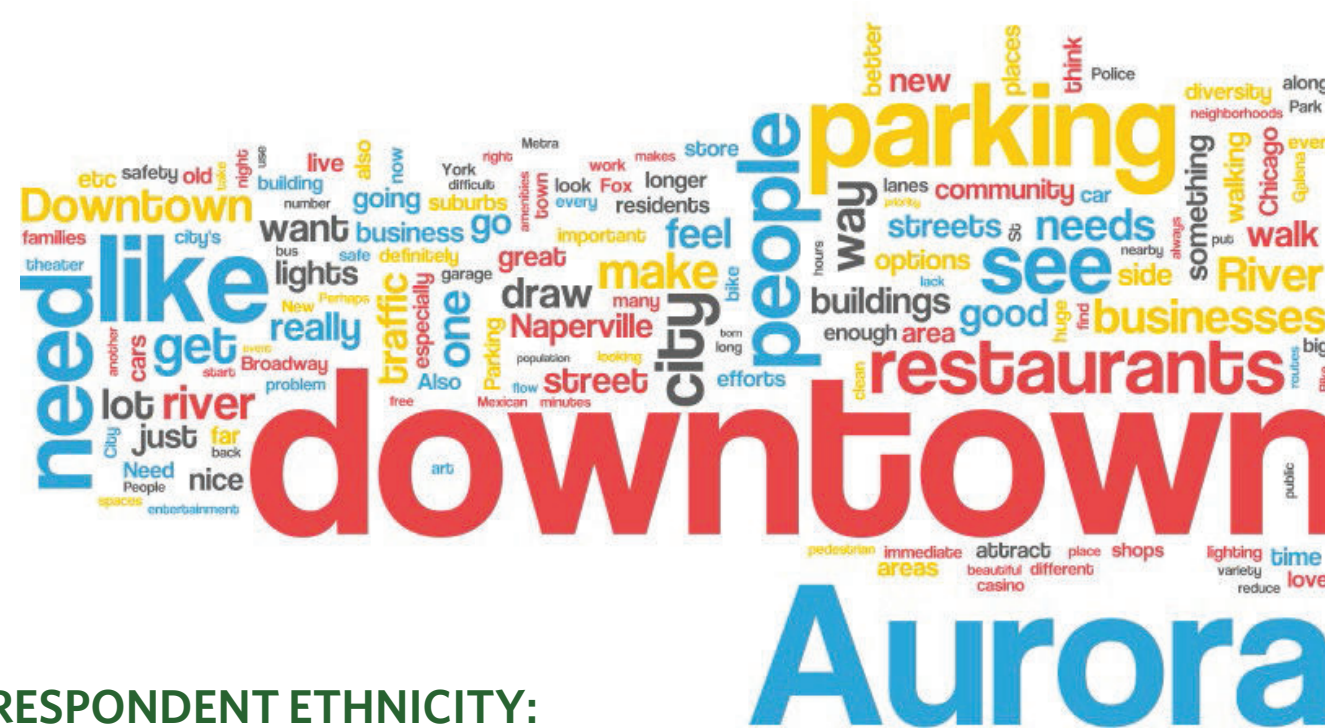
Public Open House:

Today's public open house is designed to introduce stakeholders to the themes that will be in the draft plan and get feedback.

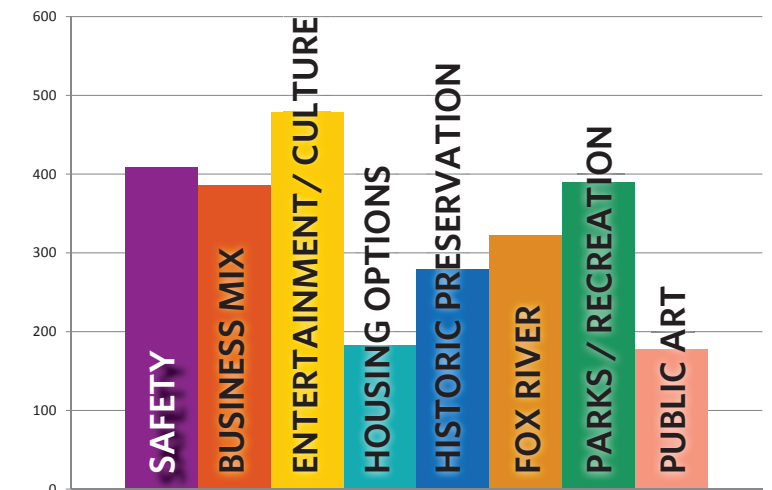
Fall Plan Review Open House, TBD:

When a draft plan has been completed, we will share it with the community for feedback.

ONLINE SURVEY RESPONSES

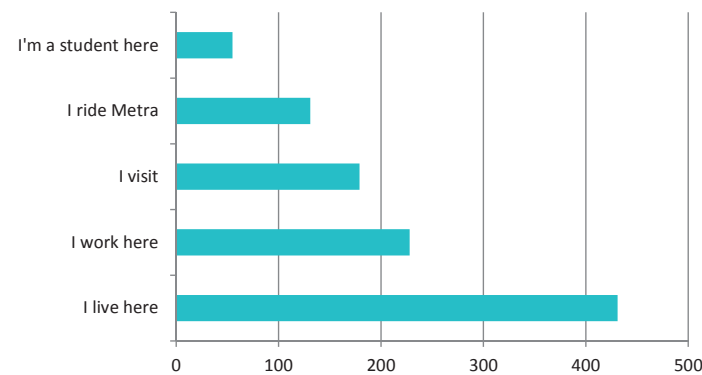


VITALITY PRIORITIES

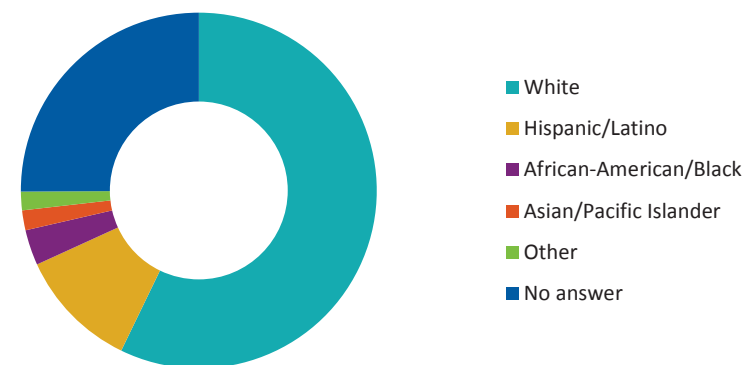


These charts (above and below) show how many times the items were ranked as a high priority by respondents.

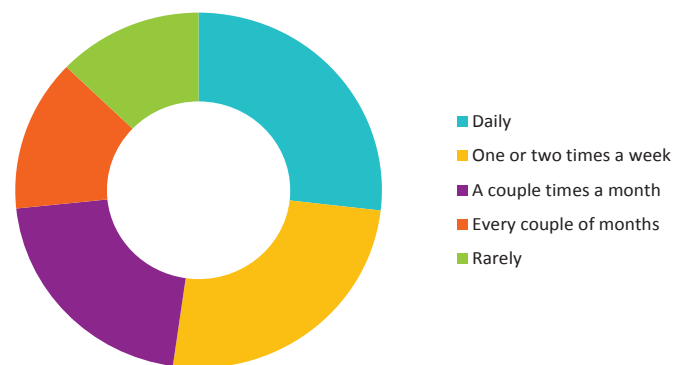
SURVEY RESPONDENTS:



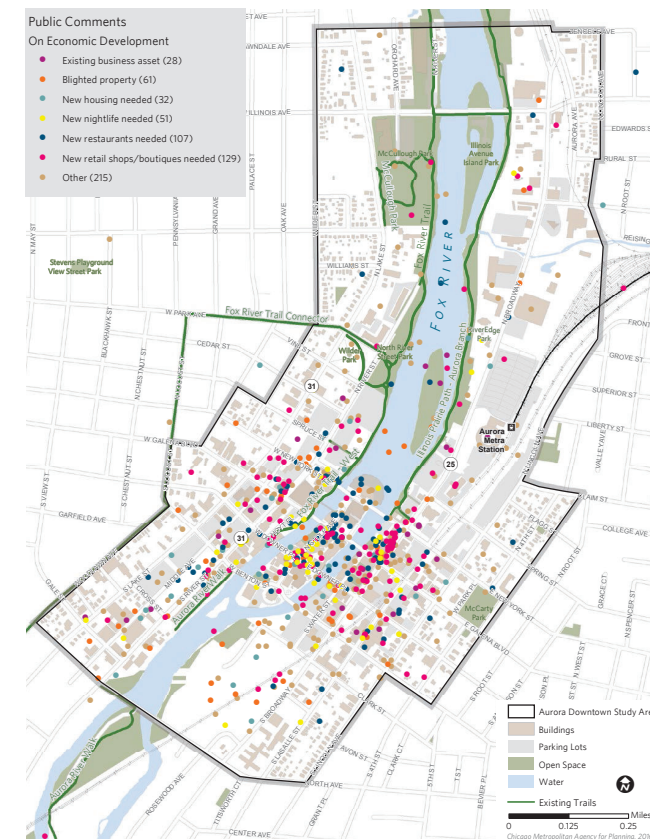
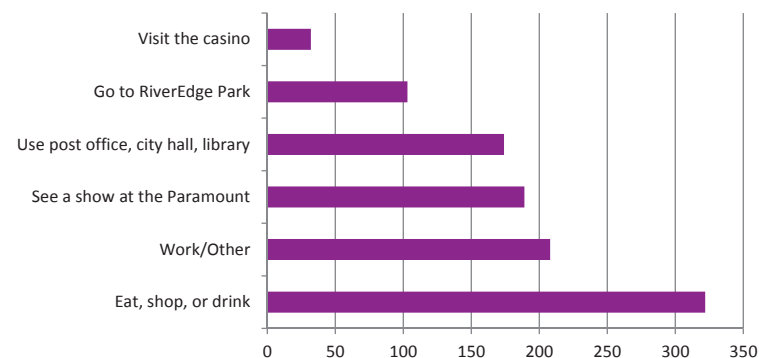
RESPONDENT ETHNICITY:



HOW FREQUENTLY DO YOU COME DOWNTOWN?

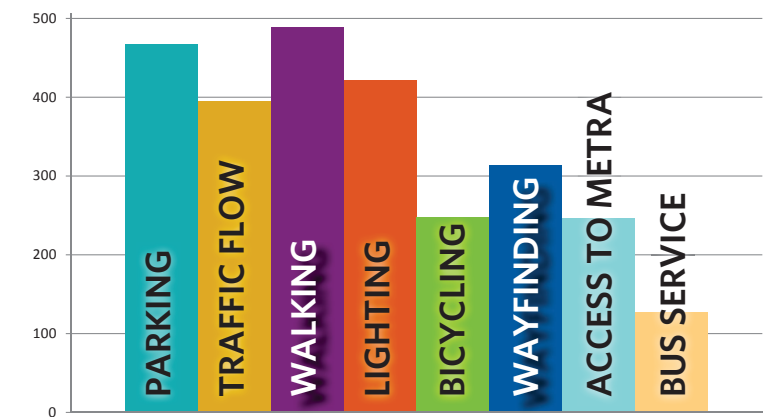


WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN REASONS FOR COMING DOWNTOWN?

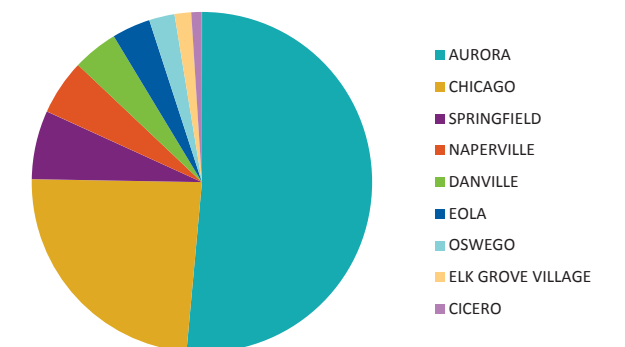


Survey respondents identified over 1,800 points on the map. This map is showing the points related to economic development.

MOBILITY PRIORITIES



SURVEY RESPONDENTS FROM:



Local survey respondents were primarily from Aurora, IL, but did come from a variety of locations. Not shown: site visitors from outside Illinois, and locations with fewer than 15 visitors.

EXPERIENCE

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Downtown Aurora will be welcoming to people who live here, work here, or just come to visit.

OVERVIEW

The Fox River and Stolp Island give downtown a unique sense of place. Other aspects of the experience of coming downtown can create a sense of welcoming and help to support meaningful social interaction. People who live and work in downtown Aurora already know their favorite dining spots, where they can easily find parking, and where their favorite stores are located. For newcomers to Aurora, signage and wayfinding can help to make their visit seamless and more enjoyable. For people arriving by car, the parking experience should be easy and not frustrating. Downtown has thousands of on-street and off-street parking spaces within the downtown. Yet finding a parking space is still fairly problematic at certain locations and during peak hours.

“For a city with the nickname ‘The City of Lights’, why not overdo it and light up the downtown area vividly? This would not only make people feel safer to walk there at night, but it can be done in an aesthetic, destination-type way that will actually draw crowds and see another reason we’re The City of Lights, and not just because of street lights.”

-Online survey comment



POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

- Signage and wayfinding**
Build a cohesive, attractive signage system to connect people to attractions, parking, & amenities.
- Improve the parking experience**
Make it easier to find parking with better lot management, improved lighting, locational efficiency, signage, etc.
- Improve pedestrian access to Metra**
Improve pedestrian connections to the Aurora Transportation Center.
- Develop strong connections to the riverfront**
Celebrate downtown as a riverfront city with pathways and connections to the river.
- Comfort and safety**
Using innovative patrolling techniques and infrastructure improvements, the City can continue to improve neighborhood safety.

- ONGOING CITY EFFORTS**
 - Along the Fox River Trail, there is signage for food and the Paramount Theatre.
 - Parking meters were removed in 2013, and enforcement shifted to time restrictions with high demand areas having shorter time limits.
 - The City supports the Aurora Downtown Special Services Area, which hosts events, works on beautification efforts and planters, and supports local businesses.
 - The development of Rider Edge Park has capitalized on Aurora’s image as a cultural destination on the Fox River.
 - The City of Aurora has over 35 crime prevention programs listed on its website including the Citizen Police Academy, Crime-free Multi-Housing Program, awareness programs for heroin and gangs, tips for vulnerable citizens such as the elderly and children walking to school.
 - The APD employs neighborhood policing strategies to work closely with neighborhood groups to address local concerns.



PARKING...did you know...?

Each parking space in a garage costs \$30,000 to build, and more to maintain.

Downtown Aurora has hundreds of free parking spaces that are not well-utilized.

If a new garage is desired, how would it be paid for? Increased taxes? \$\$\$

Or can we come up with ways to get people to use the spaces we already have?



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Downtown Aurora will have a strong and diverse economic base, highlighting its creative entrepreneurs and restaurant options, built off of arts successes in the recent past.

OVERVIEW

As has been reported over recent decades, downtown Aurora has good development potential if it can overcome the challenges of high retail competition, the need for different types of space, and not enough people with strong purchasing power living in close proximity.

POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

Economic development plan

Create economic development plan for Aurora to clarify downtown's niche role in the Fox Valley.

Business assistance

Expand business assistance programs with financial support, workshops, and training.

Address barriers to business

Identify and address challenges to opening and operating a local business.

Support small businesses

Grow entrepreneurship and assist small businesses.

Promote favorable uses

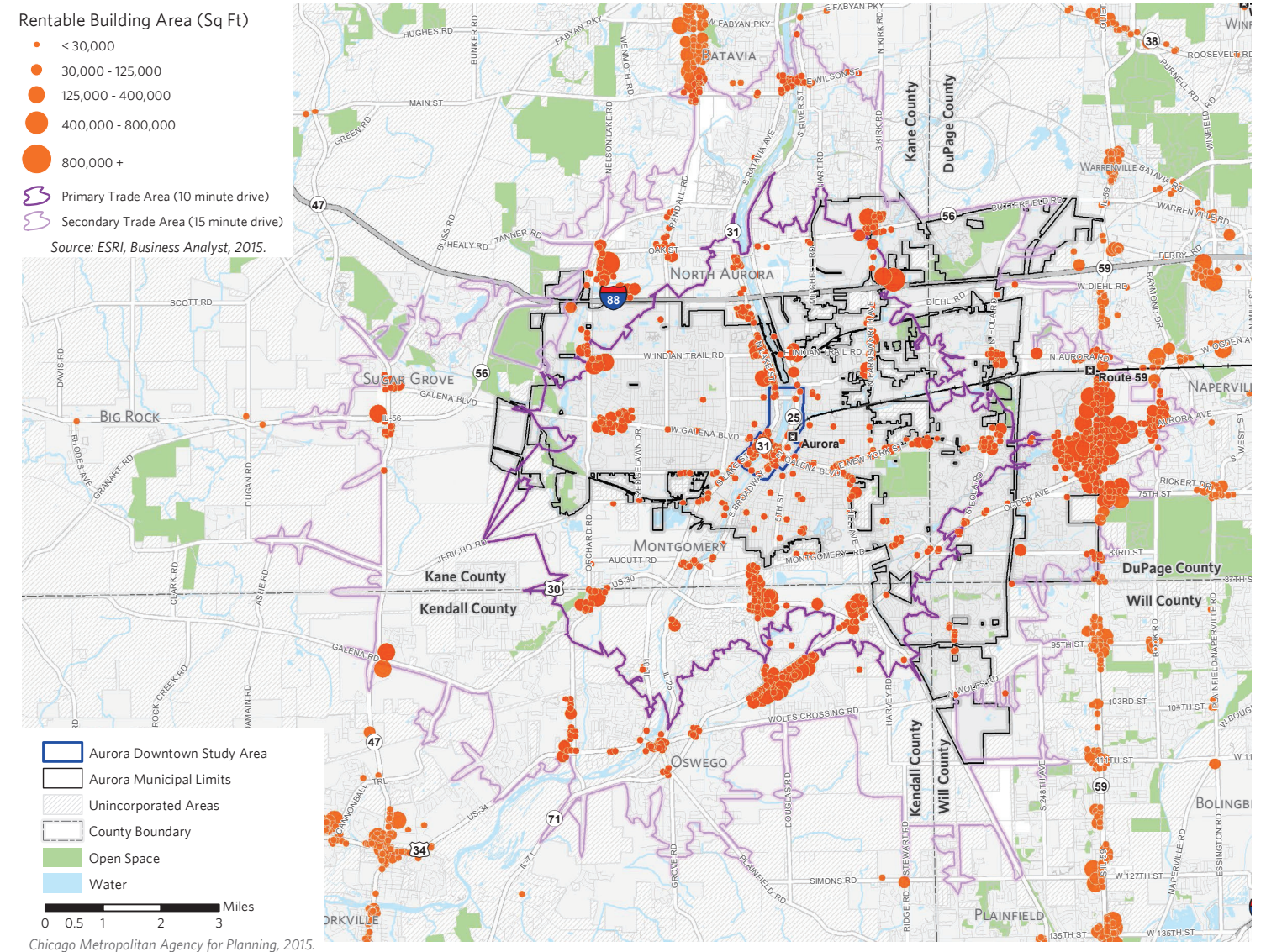
Identify & promote uses to strengthen the creative, service, riverfront, and entertainment economy.

ONGOING CITY EFFORTS

- The City and local organizations offer a number of programs, resources, grants, and incentives to support the expansion and attraction of small businesses.
- The Women's Business Development Center offers free one-on-one counseling along with events and workshops to help local businesses. Additionally, they have a business plan start-up guide and FAQ document (not just for women).
- The City developed the fiber optic cable network for schools, businesses, and tech industry.
- The City has created a Development Services Team dedicated to helping streamline the development process.
- The City has a system in place to add flexibility to the International Existing Building Code ("Chapter 34") which makes it easier and less expensive for businesses to open up in older buildings.
- The City has sought to gain ownership of important, iconic buildings to prevent their destruction and deterioration, including the BPO Elks Building.

"Businesses are a big piece that is missing from our downtown puzzle. People need a reason to come downtown and businesses could supply that reason."
-Online survey comment

"We need more diversified businesses in the downtown area for both residents and people that live here."
-Online survey comment



HOUSING

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Downtown Aurora will have a growing and engaged residential community.

OVERVIEW

POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

Encourage developers

Continue to actively solicit development of additional residential units.

Promote rehabilitation

Enhance and promote programs, credits, and rebates for rehabilitation.

Improve amenities

Seek out and promote amenities that attract downtown residents.

Address barriers

Identify and address local challenges to residential development, both rehab and new construction.

Engage residents

Develop social events and groups geared towards downtown residents.

ONGOING CITY EFFORTS

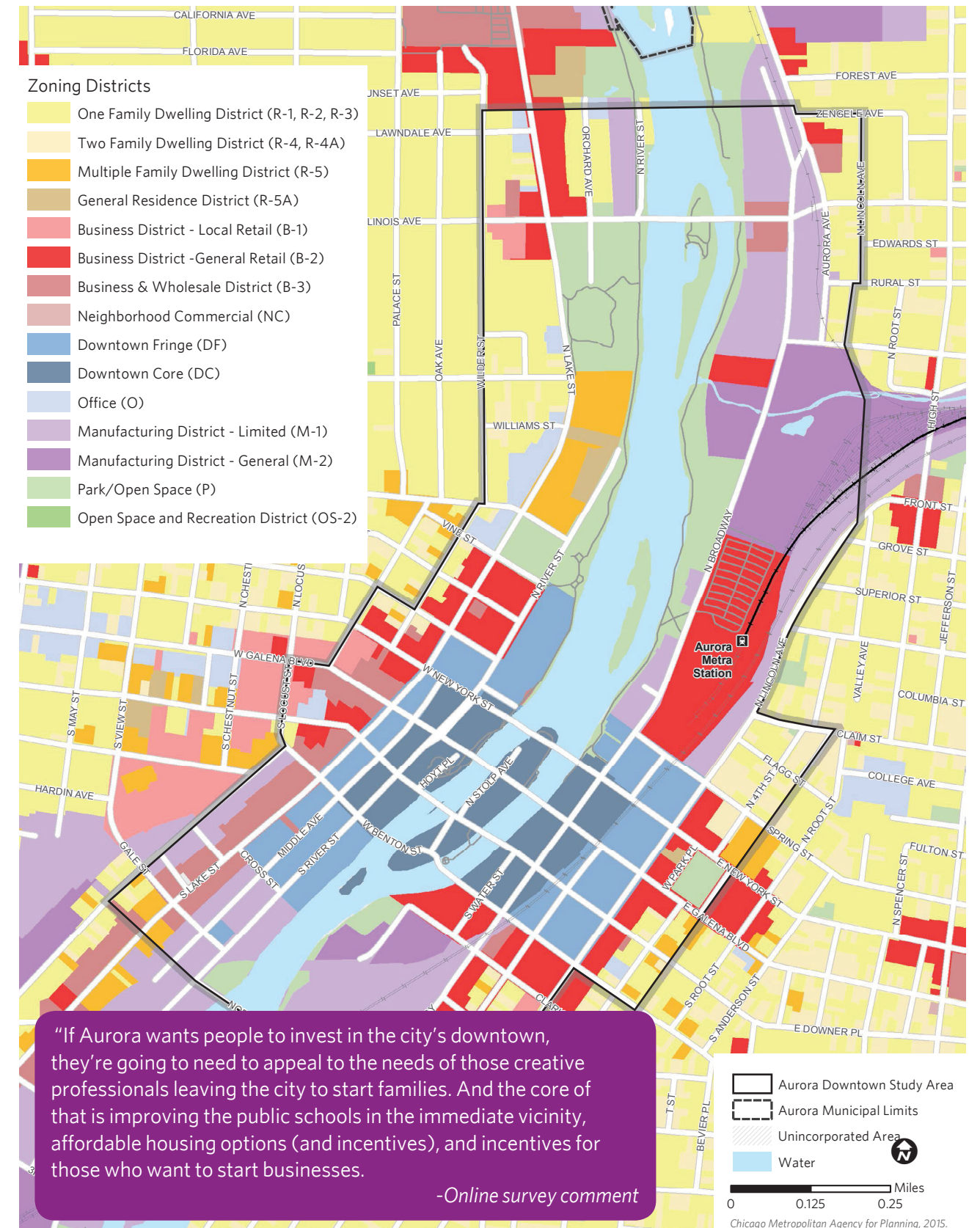
- The City has streamlined the permitting process for residential rehabilitation for downtown developers looking to add residential units downtown.
- The City has upgraded housing units and has provided financial, counseling, and foreclosure prevention services to homeowners through federal programs like HOME and CDBG.
- A new condominium complex opened in downtown at Benton and River Streets along the Fox River in 2008.
- In 2006, the City revised the Historic Preservation Guidelines which protect the character of Aurora's older neighborhoods and significant landmarks.

"New Condos on the river. Walk to train. I would move downtown with this. Having services like a Jewel - Osco would be essential to a condo complex like this."

-Online survey comment

"The only way to build a long term sustainable thriving downtown is to have more housing options downtown."

-Online survey comment



TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Downtown Aurora will have a comfortable and inviting environment for all modes of transportation.

ONGOING CITY EFFORTS

- The City has worked with the Regional Transportation Authority to develop a Pedestrian Access Plan to evaluate and improve connections to the Metra station for bicyclists and pedestrians.
- The City has converted one-way streets to two-way streets, which improves safety for people walking, biking, and driving.
- The City has secured \$10.6 million funding to construct a pedestrian bridge over the Fox River, and continues to look for additional funding to close the gap.
- The City has installed curb bump-outs on Downer Place to reduce pedestrian crossing distance, improve aesthetics, and add more pervious surface area for improved stormwater management.

POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

Pedestrian improvements

Create a comfortable walking environment using planters, benches, and other infrastructural improvements.

Bicycling encouragement

Encourage the use of bicycles for transportation through programming and infrastructure.

Healthy living programs

Create programs and events that foster active transportation.

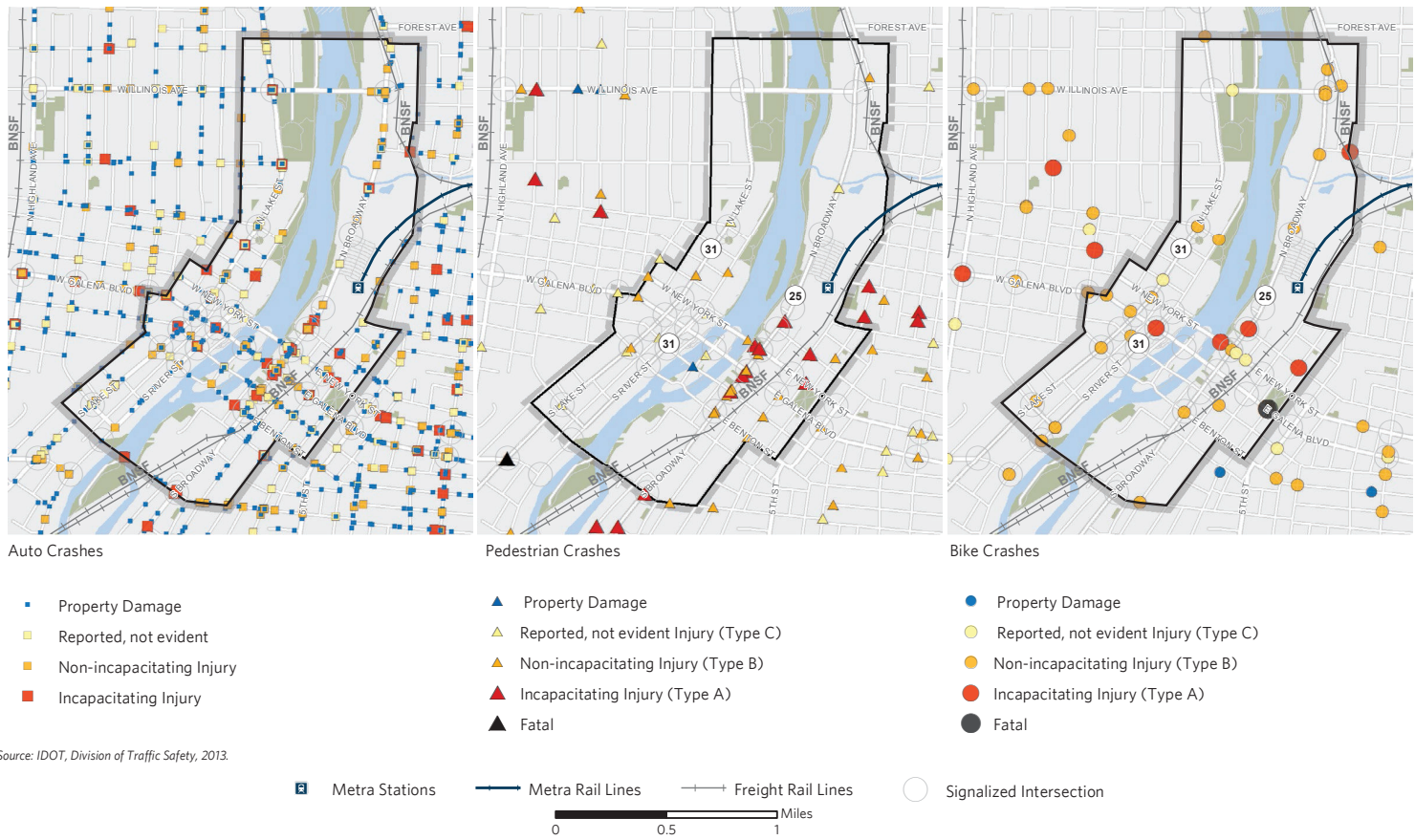
Transit usage

Encourage and promote transit usage to residents, workers, and visitors.

Complete streets policy

Adopt a Complete Streets Policy to consider all road users with construction & upgrades of streets.

AUTO, PEDESTRIAN, AND BICYCLE CRASHES (2008-2012)



OVERVIEW

Pedestrian infrastructure in the downtown core is strong. Sidewalks, planters, and clearly marked crosswalks are present throughout much of the study area, with excellent examples in the core. The corridor along Broadway, connecting to the train station, needs improvement. Major gateways into the downtown area are unappealing. The first impression when driving into the downtown area is mixed, depending on the direction of travel. Pace and Metra serve Downtown Aurora, but transit ridership is low.

DOWNER PLACE TWO-WAY CONVERSION



"Taking the bus in Aurora can take all day to go from the far east side to the west side. It's really bad. With better and more frequent bus routes we can reduce the number of cars on the streets."

-Online survey comment

"I love that downtown Aurora has dedicated and protected bike lanes and I would love to see this continue. I would also like to see this integrated into the immediate neighborhoods and supported via community programs aimed at families and schools. We should really look at the models implemented by the City of Chicago and Active Transportation Alliance, which does a lot of community-centered biking events."

-Online survey comment



"Parking is too confusing and needs to support longer hours."

-Online survey comment

FOR PARKING COMMENTS, SEE "EXPERIENCE"

IMAGE & PUBLIC SPACES

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Downtown Aurora will be promoted and recognized as a desirable destination.

ONGOING CITY EFFORTS

- There is signage for downtown along Routes 25 and 31
- An assortment of historic tours is available on the City’s website to promote the area.
- The City uses social media to engage with residents
- After a 15-year restoration process, the Grand Army of the Republic Memorial Museum on Stolp Island has recently re-opened to the public.
- Each year The Aurora Preservation Commission honors properties nominated for excellence in historic restoration with the Mayor’s Awards for Historic Preservation.
- In 2006, the City published the Historic Districts and Landmarks Guidelines to provide rules, procedures, and assistance to property owners in order to preserve and enhance the historic character of these neighborhoods and individual landmarks.
- Aurora utilized the River Edge Redevelopment Zone program to get funding to develop the River Edge Park concert venue and the former St. Charles Hospital. The City is actively seeking support for extension of the state tax credit program to help rehabilitate and save other buildings in downtown, such as the Hobbs Building.
- The City has pressured absentee landowners to adequately maintain buildings or face consequences.

“Include historic references/signage to buildings to encourage walking throughout the downtown.”
-Online survey comment

“I feel Aurora should work towards distinguishing itself from nearby Naperville and Oswego which have way too many chains and no character.”
-Online survey comment

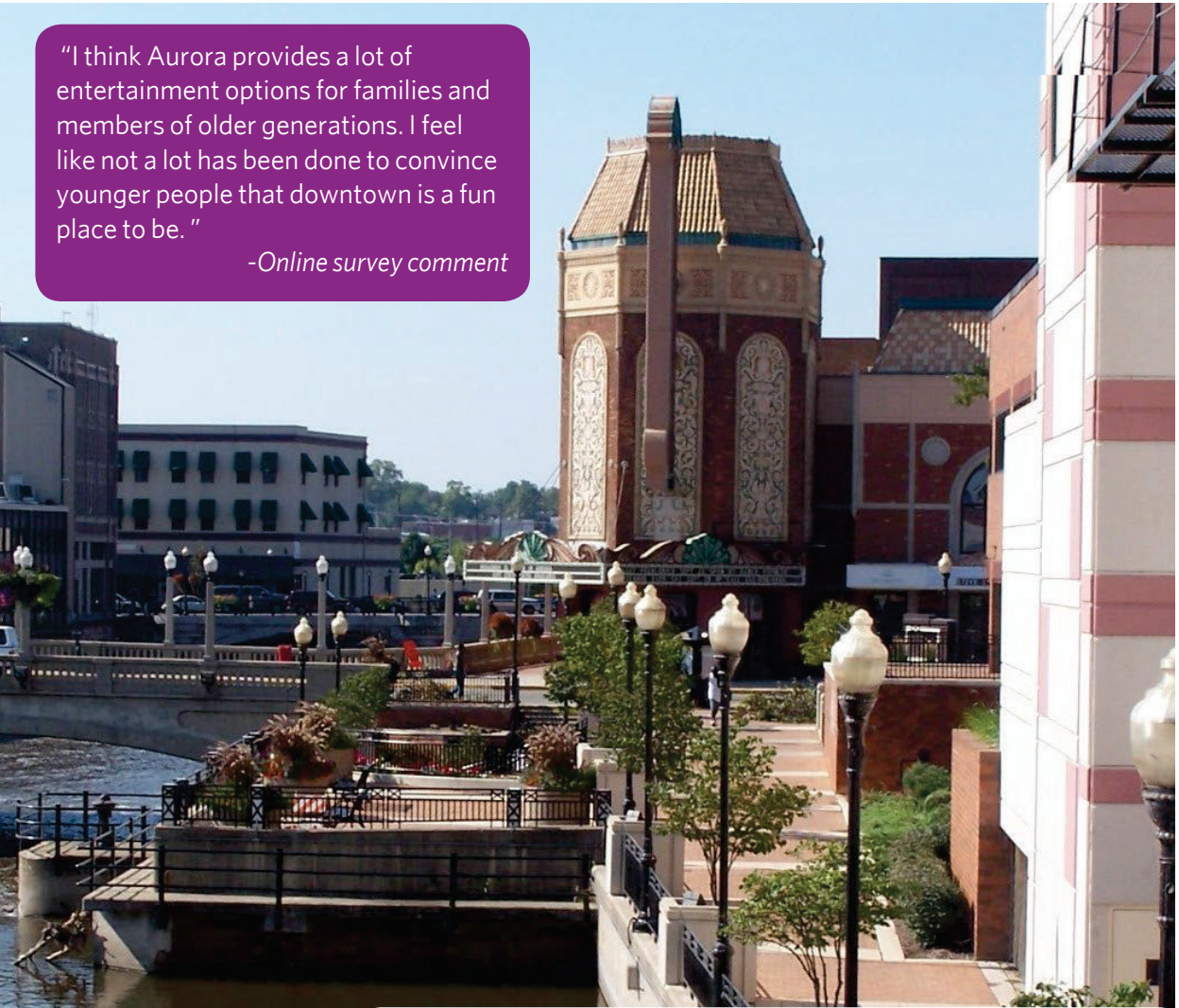
“I appreciate the community-led efforts to make Aurora an art-driven town and I would really like to see these efforts expand, possibly with partnerships from nearby art institutions (Waubensee, COD, Aurora, even Columbia, UIC and SAIC). I love that the current art scene is young and edgy and eschews the reputation suburban art galleries of being amateurish. I would like to see Aurora aggressively pursue more experimental, boundary pushing art in the future.”
-Online survey comment

IMAGE STRATEGIES

- Corridor improvements**
Cultivate distinct and attractive entry corridors to downtown with land use and infrastructure.
- Visual markers of downtown**
Establish distinct signage and markers at downtown entryways or gateways.
- Marketing and branding**
Increase marketing and branding of the downtown to attract visitors.
- Get the word out**
Utilize newsletters and social media to keep residents informed of downtown events.
- Neighborhood identity**
Use banners, signage, or markers to distinguish and highlight different neighborhoods in downtown.

“I really appreciate efforts to make downtown more festive at night. I do feel that efforts should be concentrated towards creating better lighting throughout the immediate residential neighborhoods surrounding downtown.”
-Online survey comment

“The entire gateway into downtown from I-88 looks like Detroit. Unless massive change to all gateways to downtown are improved, nobody from outside Aurora will come.”
-Online survey comment



“I think Aurora provides a lot of entertainment options for families and members of older generations. I feel like not a lot has been done to convince younger people that downtown is a fun place to be.”
-Online survey comment

PUBLIC SPACE STRATEGIES

- Streetscaping and lighting**
Enhance streetscaping and lighting to improve feelings of safety and comfort.
- Year-round activities**
Encourage and support a year-round calendar of events.
- Encourage reinvestment**
Encourage owners of vacant buildings to reinvest in their buildings or sell to interested buyers.
- Active vibrant ground floor**
Expand the use of public art and window displays to add interest to ground floors.

FOX RIVER

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

The Fox River will be celebrated as the heart and center of Aurora.

OVERVIEW

Aurora residents enjoy access to a large amount of riverfront open space. Lands along the river offer passive and active recreation opportunities, community event space, and a pleasant environment for walking and biking. The City offers a number of high quality parks, as does the Fox Valley Park District. RiverEdge Park, with its performance space and high quality amenities, is a notable recent addition to the downtown environment.

POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

Fox River programming

Activate area along Fox River with events or programs year-round to connect people to the river.

Recreational river use

Increase recreational use of the river, improve canoe chute, add or improve entry or launch points.

Trail signage

Add signage to inform trail users of natural habitat information, as well as downtown attractions.

Water quality

Investigate ways to improve water quality & restore habitat, including dam removal or modification.

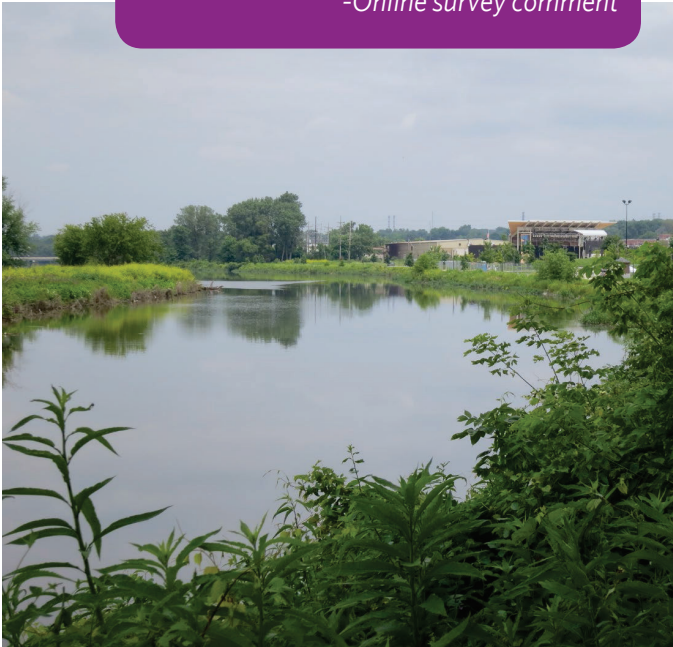
River connections

Create opportunities for people to connect with nature with outdoor seating, trails and overlooks.

ONGOING CITY EFFORTS

- The City constructed RiverEdge Park and added new riverfront trails, including the on-street missing link in the greenway trail that stretches from Algonquin to Oswego.
- To restore areas along the Fox River, environmental remediation was conducted with the support of the IEPA at a landfill site which is now part of River Edge Park. This activity was crucial to completing RiverEdge Park, a significant accomplishment for the City reflecting a strong desire to protect land around the Fox River.
- Through a partnership with The Conservation Foundation, Aurora’s rain barrel program allows residents to purchase rain barrels that collect stormwater helping to reduce runoff reaching the Fox River.
- Aurora has pursued numerous green stormwater infrastructure improvements that help to mitigate flooding and improve water quality in the Fox River, including bio-filtration facilities, rain gardens, and bioswales within the downtown area.
- The City of Aurora has been active in leading the Northwest Water Planning Alliance, an intergovernmental alliance that seeks to collaboratively plan for and steward water resources to ensure a sustainable water supply for the people, economy, environment, and future generations.

“Improve Fox River Trail wayfinding, using the sign branding used elsewhere in the 40-mile system.”
-Online survey comment



Source: Fox River, Paramount Theater by Doug Kerr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/doughtone/7130242191/>



“People need to know that there is a safe, beautiful walkway alongside the river. I suggest that someone conduct regular nature walks to identify birds and plants. Photography would be welcomed and photos could be placed online.”
-Online survey comment



ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Downtown Aurora will be known for its robust and inspired arts, culture, and entertainment community.

OVERVIEW

Aurora has unparalleled cultural and architectural amenities. High level arts, such as the Broadway Series at the Paramount Theatre, have been a great success in Aurora, attracting thousands of visitors to the area on a regular basis. Numerous museums and institutions offer culture, classes, and valuable programs that are often underutilized by the community. A growing arts and culture scene has brought renewed interest and appreciation for the downtown area in recent years, which could complement the many public and civic organizations that exist and enhance economic development opportunities and attractiveness.

ONGOING CITY EFFORTS

- The City is supportive of local efforts to promote arts and culture, such as First Fridays and Wednesdays at the Plaza, and other events.
- The City has funded the Aurora Public Art Commission, located in the David L. Pierce Art & History Center, for 20 years.
- The Aurora Public Art Commission has an extensive advertising effort to inform people of their work.
- Blues on the Fox is the City of Aurora's annual festival that celebrates the city's rich history of the Blues.
- The Aurora Civic Center Authority has grown their audience to 300,000 people and \$16 million today, mostly in part to the successful Broadway series at the Paramount Room.

"I really like how Aurora has encouraged and prioritized cultural efforts for the community and really appreciate the young, communal vibe of the scene here. Aurora is in a unique position to learn from Chicago's successful and unsuccessful efforts to draw and retain artists."

-Online survey comment



"Riverfront Playhouse: under-marketed 'local treasure.'"
-Online survey comment

POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

Arts task force

Create a local arts task force comprised of non-profits, public, and private entities.

Architectural tourism

Promote the variety and history of Aurora's unique architecture.

Public art

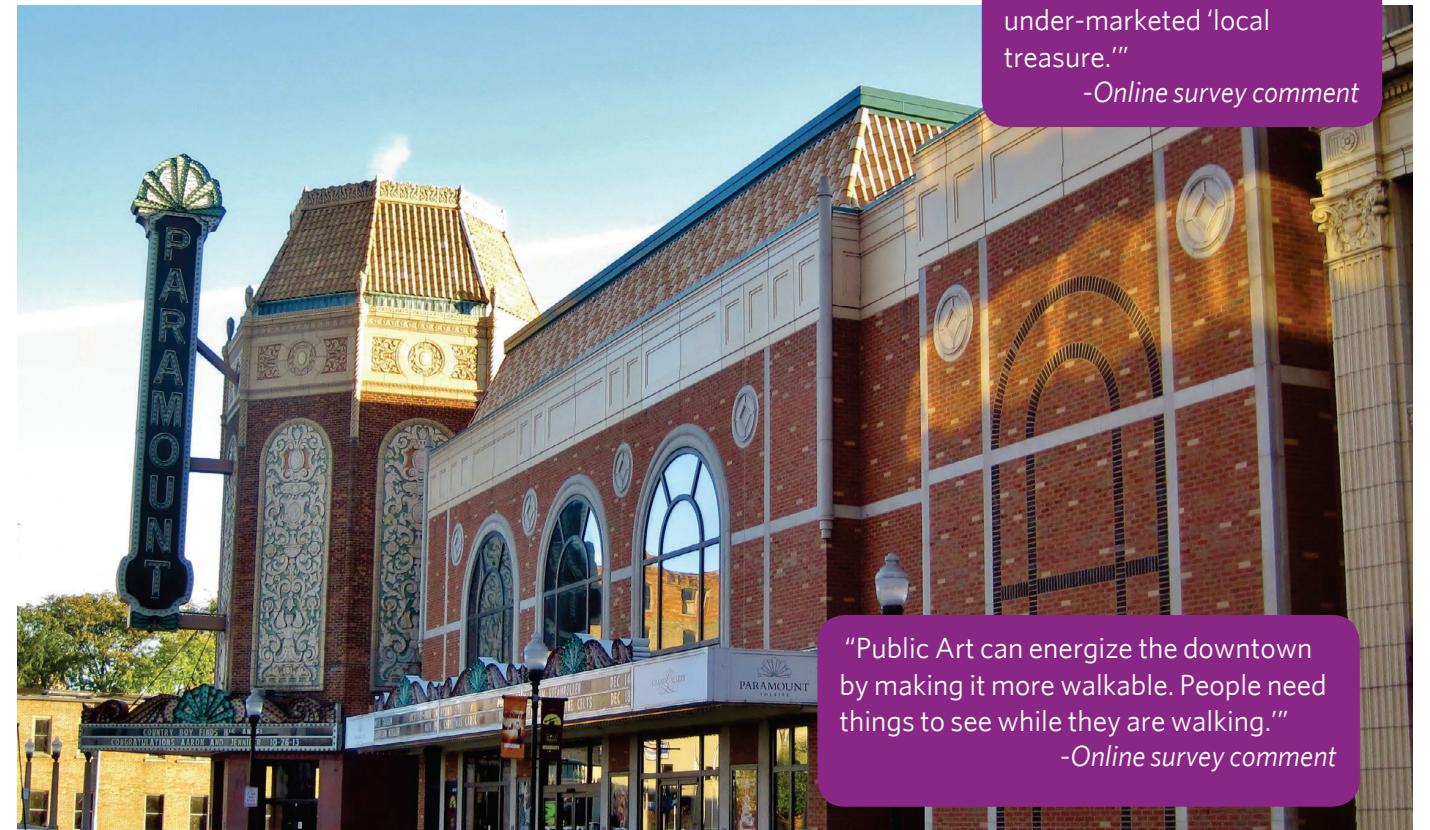
Sponsor public art in prominent locations and as neighborhood identifiers.

Artists' lofts

Support development of artists' lofts and housing for seasonal performers.

Support and promote arts

Enhance support for and promotion of arts, cultural, and entertainment efforts, groups, and events.



Source: Paramount Theater by Teemu008. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/teemu08/10760989534/>

"Public Art can energize the downtown by making it more walkable. People need things to see while they are walking."
-Online survey comment

